

## 3.2.3 Recreation, Special Uses, and Scenery Management

### 3.2.3.1 Affected Environment

#### Recreation and Special Uses

The Upper Touchet Vegetation Management Project Area (Project Area), currently offers a wide range of recreational opportunities including: dispersed camping, hiking, hunting, ATV riding, and snowmobiling. The area also offers visitors opportunities for sight-seeing, hunting, and forest product gathering of mushrooms, firewood, and Christmas trees. There are 3 developed areas that are under Special Use Authorization within the Project Area: the Ski Bluewood Resort (Bluewood), the Bluewood Communication Site, and the Touchet SNOTEL Site.

Bluewood has been providing recreational opportunities to public, averaging 30,000 skier and snowboarder visits each year. Facilities include a lodge, 2 surface lifts, 2 aerial lifts, and several outbuildings. Bluewood is a popular skiing destination for the surrounding communities of Dayton, Tri-Cities, and Walla Walla. The resort offers 400 acres of skiable terrain, with 24 trails and 3 terrain parks. Bluewood offers a variety of groomed routes to a range of abilities, but it is known in the area for its quality tree skiing.

A primary focus for this project is to enhance skiing opportunities and reduce skiing hazards within the Bluewood permit area. Currently, the variety of skiable terrain is limited in some forested portions of the permit area by the presence of downed trees and the density of standing trees. These attributes limit skier access, present safety hazards, and contribute to excessive hazard tree recruitment.

There is no congressionally designated Wilderness within the project area. No activity will occur within any Wilderness areas and this factor will not be discussed further.

There are no IRAs with the project area. The nearest IRA is the Spangler IRA, located adjacent to the project area. No activity will occur within the IRA and this factor will not be discussed further.

#### Scenery

The existing condition of lands within and affected by the project presents a landscape that has been managed and is developed in nature. The ski area, motorized ATV use, motorized use on existing roads, hunting, and dispersed camping are all recognizable activities within the project area.

Lands within the Ski Bluewood Resort have been modified and developed with various infrastructure and evidence of past harvest from the creation of the ski runs. These areas have been managed in compliance with the Bluewood Ski Area Vegetative Management Plan to keep the existing ski runs open. While the resort is not visible from the Touchet River Road, the ski runs are visible from the foreground, middleground, and background from the resort parking area. The summit of the Bluewood offers panoramic views of the surrounding Blue Mountains as well as the steep drainages of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. While the linear needs of ski facilities make it difficult to blend them into the natural landscape character, the ski run design borrows from natural openings in the existing landscape character.

The project area has two travel routes identified in the Forest Plan as sensitive for visual concerns.

- The Touchet River Road 64, from the FS boundary to FS Road 6437, is defined as a sensitive level 1 route. The views from the Touchet River Road are primarily foreground views of a timbered landscape. They are very few opportunities to observe scenery beyond the edge of the road.
- Forest Road 46, from the Godman Guard Station to the Skyline Road 64, is identified as a sensitive level 2 route. The views from this road are initially timbered and open up to overlook the steep terrain of the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. The slopes are pattered with grassland and timbered draws.

For more information regarding the affected area see the Recreation, Special Uses, and Scenery Report.

### 3.2.3.2 Relevant Laws, Regulations, Policies, Guidance, and Plans

The following are the relevant laws, regulations, and policy used for this analysis:

**Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)** (USDA Forest Service, 1990): The Forest Plan provides management direction for all Forest activities by defining goals and standards for projects. The Forest Plan also designates Forest Management Areas (MAs) throughout the Forest, with each MA having its own goal, objective, and desired future condition. With Forest Plan guidance, projects are developed with MA goals and objectives in mind.

Listed below are the MA goals for recreation and visuals under the 1990 Forest Plan:

- A3 Viewshed  
**Recreation Goal:** *Manage dispersed recreation in the area to a Roaded Natural Visphysical and social setting.*  
**Visual Quality Objective:** *Retention in the foreground and Partial Retention in the middleground.*
- A4 Viewshed  
**Recreation Goal:** *Manage dispersed recreation in the area for a range of physical and social settings from Roaded Natural to Roaded Modified.*  
**Visual Quality Objective:** *Partial Retention in the foreground and Modification in the middleground.*
- A6 Developed Recreation  
**Recreation Goal:** *Provide and manage developed recreation primarily to Roaded Natural settings with some rural settings.*  
**Visual Quality Objective:** *Retention or Partial Retention.*
- E2 Timber and Big Game  
**Recreation goal:** *A roaded modified social and physical setting ROS may result from meeting the goal.*  
**Visual Quality Objective:** *Modified*

**Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS):** The Forest Service also analyzes the effects of activities to recreational resources by evaluating for consistency with the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class that is assigned to each MA in the Forest Plan. The ROS is a nationally recognized classification system used to demonstrate the potential interaction between visitors and the natural world. The ROS

describes different recreational settings, opportunities, and experiences that help guide recreation management activities. There are two distinct ROS classes present in the Project Area:

- **Roaded Natural:** Area is characterized by predominately natural appearing environments with moderate evidence of the sights and sounds of humans. Such evidence usually harmonizes with the natural environment. Interactions between users may be moderate to light with evidence of other users prevalent. Resource modification and utilization practices are evident but harmonize with the natural environment. Conventional motorized use is allowed and incorporated into construction standards and design facilities.
- **Roaded Modified:** Area is characterized by a natural environment that has been substantially modified by development of structures and vegetative manipulation. Sights and sounds of humans are readily evident and the interaction between users is often moderate to high. Facilities are often provided for special activities. Moderate user densities are present away from developed sites. Facilities for intensified motorized use and parking are available.

**Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs):** The Visual Management System establishes VQOs within each Management Area, which are guided by Forest Plan objectives. Within the project area, there are the following three VQOs:

- **Retention:** A Visual Quality Objective which in general means human activities are not evident to the casual forest visitor.
- **Partial Retention:** A Visual Quality Objective which in general terms means human activity may be evident but must remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape.
- **Modification:** A Visual Quality Objective meaning human activity may dominate the characteristic landscape but must, at the same time, utilize naturally established form, line, color, and texture. It should appear as a natural occurrence when viewed in foreground or middleground.

**Bluewood Ski Area Vegetative Management Plan** (USDA Forest Service, Bluewood Ski Area Vegetative Management Plan, 1983): This plan was signed and accepted on May 16, 1983. The intent of the plan is to guide objectives and direction for managing the vegetation within Bluewood. The plan addresses where vegetation should be introduced, maintained, reduced, or eliminated to enhance the skiing experience.

### 3.2.3.3 Methodology

Geographic Information Systems mapping was used to portray spatial relationships between recreation use areas and the activities that could affect the continued use of the area. See the Recreation, Special Uses, and Scenery Report for maps of MAs and ROS classes within the project area.

## MEASURES AND INDICATORS

The following indicators are used in this analysis to measure the effects of treatments on recreation resources within the Project Area. Most of the measures and indicators are quantifiable, but in the case

that they are not, they will be considered in qualitative terms using professional judgement. Listed below are the resource elements that will be analyzed:

#### Recreation

- **Recreational Opportunities:** This includes areas under Special Use Permit, dispersed camping, hiking and snowmobiling trails, hunting, and forest product gathering.
- **Access to Activities:** This includes trailhead and access points to recreational opportunities.
- **Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS):** This includes the level of development and settings as defined by the ROS definitions.
- **Scenery Management:** This includes Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) as defined in the Forest Plan.

Table 1: Summary of recreation resource indicators and measures for existing conditions.

Resource Element	Resource Indicator (quantify if possible)	Measure (quantify if possible)	Existing Condition
<b>Recreational Opportunities</b>	Special Uses	Acres of permit area	1,597 acres
	Trails (Summer & Winter)	Trail Miles	20.6 miles
	Hunting	Not quantifiable	Hunting permitted
	Dispersed Camping	Number of campsites	Not inventoried
	Forest Products Gathering	Not quantifiable	Mushroom & firewood gathering, and berry picking permitted.
<b>Recreational Access</b>	Trailhead/access points	Number of trailheads/access	2
<b>Recreational Experience</b>	Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)	ROS Classes	2, Roaded Natural and Roaded Modified

Table 2: Summary of scenery resource indicators and measures for existing conditions.

Resource Element	Resource Indicator (quantify if possible)	Measure (quantify if possible)	Existing Condition	
<b>Scenery Management</b>	Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs)	VQOs for each Management Area (MA)	MA A3	Retention in the foreground, Partial Retention in the middleground
			MA M4	Partial Retention in the foreground, Modification in the middleground.
			MA A6	Retention or Partial Retention
			MA E2	Modified

### 3.2.3.4 Impacts Analysis

#### ALTERNATIVE A – PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE

##### ANALYSES:

The temporal bounds of this analysis for effects on recreation, special uses, and scenery resources are immediately during implementation to 1-3 years in the short-term and 10-15 years in the long term. These timeframes best capture effects on the relevant resources.

Listed below are the direct and indirect effects of vegetation treatments on recreation and special use resources. For a summary of effects for all three alternatives see Table 3 and for a more detailed discussion on effects see the Recreation, Special Uses, and Scenery Report.

- Dust, noise, and congestion from logging operations and truck traffic could temporarily impact recreational experiences and settings.
- Smoke from prescribed burning operations could temporarily impact recreational experiences and settings.
- The number of dispersed campsites in the Project Area would stay the same. Recreationists could experience a temporary loss of access to favorite camping, hunting and forest gathering locations during treatment activities.
- The number of miles for system trails and roads in the Project Area would stay the same. Temporary closures may be implemented on trails or routes used for hiking, ATV riding, and snowmobiling during vegetation treatment activities.
- New temporary roads or skid trails that are situated near existing ATV trails and roads, could indirectly encourage motorized use on unauthorized routes.
- There would be no change in acreage for ski operations. Skiing opportunities would improve with the creation of more open runs and skiable terrain would occur immediately after treatment and for 5-15 years until more trees grow in.
- Improved safety at Bluewood, developed recreation sites, and special use sites would occur immediately after the removal of danger and hazard trees and would need to be reevaluated as more trees move in.
- Improved defensible space around values at risk (ski area facilities, communication site, and SNOTEL site) with the treatment to fuel loads would occur immediately after treatment and 5-15 years until more trees grow in.
- Short-term changes to ROS setting could occur during and after vegetation treatments, but there would be no long term change to the ROS classification.

Listed below are the direct and indirect effects of vegetation treatments on scenery resources. For a summary of effects for all three alternatives see Table 3 and for a more detailed discussion on effects see the Recreation, Special Uses, and Scenery Report.

- Visual quality would be temporarily reduced as viewers may notice stumps, slash, openings, charred or blackened vegetation, paint, and skid trails, for up to three years until disturbed areas are repaired and revegetated.
- VQOs would remain the same in each management area and would improve scenic stability with the thinning of dense stands, removal of hazard trees, and reduction in fuel loads.

#### *CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ANALYSES:*

No cumulative effects of vegetation treatment activities to recreation and special use resources are anticipated. No reasonably foreseeable future projects are proposed in the area. All action alternatives would be in compliance with the 1990 Forest Plan's forest wide standards and guidelines for recreation, special uses, and scenery.

#### *CONCLUSION:*

While the direct impacts of vegetation treatments would adversely impact recreation, special uses, and scenery resources, these effects would primarily be short term, lasting 1-3 years, primarily while logging operations are active. However, recreation, special uses, and scenery resources would benefit from vegetation treatments in the long term. Beneficial effects would be observed especially within the Bluewood Ski Area, where treatment would enhance skiing opportunities, reduce hazards, improve defensible space around values at risk, and increase scenic stability.

### **ALTERNATIVE B – NO TEMPORARY ROAD CONSTRUCTION**

#### *ANALYSES:*

Under Alternative B, temporary road access and the construction of both new temporary roads as well as temporary roads constructed using an existing template would be eliminated. The effects of Alternative B on recreation and special use resources are essentially the same as in Alternative A. However, with the elimination of temporary road construction near motorized trails and roads, the mitigations to deter unauthorized use would not be needed.

The eliminated road construction would not change VQOs. For a summary of effects for all three alternatives see Table 3 and for a more detailed discussion on effects see the Recreation, Special Uses, and Scenery Report.

#### *CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ANALYSES:*

Same as Alternative A.

#### *CONCLUSION:*

Same as Alternative A

### **ALTERNATIVE D – REMOVAL OF TREES OVER 21 INCHES DBH**

#### *ANALYSES:*

Under Alternative D, silvicultural activities would allow limited cutting and removal of some trees over 21 inches DBH to include grand fir up to 30" DBH, but few other species would be thinned due to their lack of abundance. While most of the effects on recreation and special use resources are essentially the same as Alternative A, the intensity of treatment under this alternative are not strictly quantified. Estimates generated by the district silviculturist indicate approximately 2.6% of the Ski Bluewood area treatments may involve >21" tree removal. Many of these trees will have been identified as safety hazards to skiers venturing into glade territory. Non-hazard tree removal will focus on individual grand firs whose removal will enhance glade skiing opportunities and overall stand health. Removal of >21" trees will occur in gladed areas where natural openings borrow from existing lines and features on the landscape, which will maintain the VQO of Partial Retention within the Ski Bluewood permit area. Close coordination with and feedback from the SUP holder will be considered before the removal of any larger diameter trees.

*CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ANALYSES:*

Same as Alternative A

*CONCLUSION:*

Same as Alternative A

Table 3: Summary of effects for all alternatives.

Resource Element	Resource Indicator (quantify if possible)	Measure (quantify if possible)	Effects Alternative A-Proposed Action	Effects Alternative B	Effects Alternative D
<b>Recreational Opportunities</b>	Special Uses, Trails (Summer & Winter), Hunting, Dispersed Camping, Forest Product Gathering	Acres of permit area, Trail Miles, Number of campsites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dust, noise, and congestion from logging operations and truck traffic could temporarily impact recreational experiences and settings.</li> <li>Smoke from prescribed burning operations could temporarily impact recreational experiences and settings.</li> <li>The number of dispersed campsites in the Project Area would stay the same. Recreationists could experience a temporary loss of access to favorite camping, hunting and forest gathering locations during treatment activities.</li> <li>The number of miles for system trails and roads in the Project Area would stay the same. Temporary closures may be implemented on trails or routes used for hiking, ATV riding, and snowmobiling during vegetation treatment activities.</li> <li>New temporary roads or skid trails that are situated near existing ATV trails and roads could indirectly encourage motorized use on unauthorized routes.</li> <li>No change in the current land use for ski operations. Skiing opportunities would improve with the creation of more open runs and skiable terrain would occur immediately after treatment and for 5-15 years until more trees grow in.</li> <li>Improved safety at Bluewood, developed recreation sites, and special use sites would occur immediately after the removal of danger and hazard trees and would need to be monitored as more trees move in.</li> <li>Improved defensible space around values at risk (ski area facilities, communication site, and SNOTEL site) with the treatment to fuel loads would occur immediately after treatment and 5-15 years until more trees grow in.</li> <li>Short-term changes to ROS setting could occur during and after vegetation treatments, but there would be no long term change to the ROS classification.</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A, except: unauthorized routes near motorized trails and roads would be less likely to occur without the construction of new temporary roads.	Same as Alternative A
<b>Recreational Access</b>	Trailhead/access points	Number of trailheads/access points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The number of trailhead and access points would stay the same. Short-term loss of access to favorite camping, hunting and forest gathering locations.</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A
<b>Recreational Experience</b>	Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)	ROS Classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short-term setting change, but over the long term no change to the ROS</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A
<b>Scenery</b>	Visual Quality Objectives	VQO Classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visual quality would temporarily decrease following treatments.</li> <li>In the long term treatments would meet Forest Plan VQOs and would</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A



	(VQO)		improve scenic stability with the thinning of dense trees, removal of hazard trees, and reduction in fuel loads.		
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Table 3: Summary of effects for all alternatives.